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DATE OF REPORT 12/17/79	NAME AND TITLE Tenzin N. Tethong, Acting Representative of H.H. the Dalai Lama		SIGNATURE 

BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY BETWEEN BHUTAN
AND THE TIBETAN REFUGEES IN BHUTAN

ISSUED BY: THE OFFICE OF TIBET
801 SECOND AVENUE
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INTRODUCTION:

In 1959, when a large influx of Tibetans poured into India, the Government of India suggested that those refugees who were coming through Bhutan should be resettled there to lessen the pressure of rehabilitation burden in India and also that the refugees themselves would find it easier to adapt to the conditions there because of the similiarity in geographical situation and common cultural and social links between Tibetans and Bhutanese. We agreed to this suggestion and an official representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama was sent there to organize resettlement camps and to assist the Bhutanese authorities in the implementation of rehabilitation projects. These projects were financed by the Government of India.

In 1961 the Government of India proceeded to stop the entry of Tibetan refugees into India from Bhutan. Subsequently, a plan was drawn up by the Government of India and Bhutan along with representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama whereby asylum was granted and provisions were made for the settlement of 4000 Tibetans in Bhutan. The majority of Tibetans were settled on agricultural sites at Paro, Bumthang, Thimphu, Jigme-Nang, Karje and Bodgar, which were begun in 1963 and completed in late 1974.

FIRST ALLEGATIONS:

During the first week of March 1974, some 28 Tibetan refugees in Bhutan including Mr. Lhading, the Tibetan Refugee Rehabilitation

Officer, were suddenly arrested by Bhutanese Palace Guards. Upon receiving this information, we immediately approached the Royal Bhutan Mission in New Delhi requesting information on this matter; however, we were advised that the Mission could not supply us with any details of the arrests. They remained evasive, offering little in the way of particulars about events leading up to and including the arrests of our people.

TORTURE OF TIBETANS AND ALLEGATIONS OF SABOTAGE:

On May 2nd, 1974, two representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama were sent to Bhutan to investigate reports that prisoners were being tortured. During a meeting with the Royal Advisory Council of Bhutan, which the King attended, these charges were denied. The King advised these representatives that the prisoners were found guilty of planning acts of sabotage and engaging in covert activities. However, his claim that arms and ammunition had been captured from the imprisoned Tibetans could not be corroborated, since the Tibetan representatives were repeatedly denied contact with any of those arrested. Thus, our representatives told the Bhutanese government that there was no persuasive evidence to believe the accusations that Tibetans had been involved in the subversive activities but that, if the Bhutanese government was willing to supply us with substantial proof, we would accept the consequent punishment - provided that those arrested were given their fundamental legal privileges and tried according to due process of law.

FURTHER ARRESTS AND ALLEGATIONS OF AN ASSASSINATION PLOT:

In mid-May, as soon as our representatives left Bhutan, the palace guards arrested 180 more Tibetans. These further arrests naturally worsened an already deteriorating situation. On this occasion the original contention of why they were arrested was changed and new allegations were made - the Bhutanese Ambassador to the United Nations, Mr. Sangay Penjor, announcing on June 1, 1974, to the world press, that a plot to assassinate the King of Bhutan and to burn down fortresses had been uncovered. He announced that Bhutan's Deputy Home Minister Phuntsog Thondup, Royal Bhutan Police Commandant Dada, a Bhutanese named Tortola and some Tibetan refugees were also arrested. It was alleged that an undetermined number of Tibetans living in India had master-minded the plots. Once again, the Bhutanese government was unwilling to provide evidence to substantiate the new allegations. Despite further representation by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in which He requested the Bhutanese government not to take drastic measures, the Government of Bhutan did not comply with any of the requests issued by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Needless to say, we were bewildered by the sudden shift of the charges from sabotage to assassination - charges that were never mentioned prior to public announcements. We publicly denied any Tibetan involvement in the alleged plots and reiterated our conviction that the Government of Bhutan was ill-advised in believing Tibetan involvement.

THE "YANGKI" CONNECTION:

Following the departure of our representatives on July 4, 1974, two truck-loads of Tibetans and Bhutanese from Phuntsogling were arrested, and a new allegation of having contact with Yangki (Tibetan mistress of the late king presumed to be plotting to take over the royal line) was introduced, on July 6th.

SECRET TRIALS AND EXPULSION OF TIBETANS:

Only in early September did reliable sources in Bhutan inform us that clandestine trials in Thimphu had started on August 6, 1974, as the Government of Bhutan had imposed strict censoring of mail and ban on travel by Tibetans. The Tibetans standing trial were in disabled physical condition, having to be supported or carried on stretchers, indicating various types of incapacitation. Contrary to earlier assurances of a fair and public trial, we learned that the trials were anything but fair or public. The general public and foreigners were strictly banned; thus, the whole scheme of operations at Thimphu was of a secretive nature. Then, on September 7, 1974, the Government of Bhutan informed His Holiness' office in Dharamsala that if we agreed to remove all 4000 Tibetans from Bhutan, the prisoners would be released. On September 14th, we requested the Bhutanese government not to link the issue of prisoners with the other Tibetan settlers in Bhutan, whom the Bhutanese King himself declared to be innocent of any involvement in the alleged plots.

In mid-October the Bhutanese government suddenly arrested and expelled from Thimphu to the Indian border another 80 Tibetans. Subsequently, a group of 11 Tibetans were expelled in a similar manner. No reason, formal or otherwise, was given for these expulsions. Most of these Tibetans were snatched from the streets in Thimphu, imprisoned for a few days, and then escorted to the border and expelled.

At the end of October 1974, the trial which commenced in August was supposedly concluded, but contrary to the Bhutanese declaration that the results of the trials would be announced to the world press, nothing was disclosed, and no evidence was produced. On October 28, 1974, without specific reference to the earlier alleged plots, the Bhutanese King advised the Tibetan authorities that unequivocal assurances indicating that the Tibetans in Bhutan would be law-abiding and loyal to that government were needed.

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA'S RESPONSE:

Having learned of this directive, His Holiness the Dalai Lama wrote to the King of Bhutan assuring him that the Tibetans in Bhutan would be law-abiding and loyal, for Tibetans, wherever they have settled throughout the world, certainly support His Holiness' contention that they remain loyal to their respective host governments.

TIBETAN-BHUTANESE DISCUSSIONS:

On September 14, 1975, Mr. Wangdu Dorjee, Director of Home and Rehabilitation Affairs for the Central Tibetan Administration, met the King of Bhutan during His Majesty's official visit to New Delhi. At that time, Mr. Dorjee discussed the issue of prisoners with the King. Another meeting was held in October 1975, at the request of the Foreign Minister of Bhutan, Dawa Tsering. The King was also present at this occasion.

The question of whether all Tibetans residing in Bhutan were prepared to accept Bhutanese citizenship was the first topic of discussion. Mr. Dorjee pointed out that he could not make any decision regarding the technicality of Tibetans taking formal citizenship until such time as other issues had been resolved, including the release of prisoners. The King refused to discuss the subject of prisoners, saying that other issues would be considered only after resolution of the citizenship issue.

During his stay in Bhutan, Mr. Dorjee visited relatives of the prisoners and was informed that none of them had been allowed to see the prisoners. Furthermore, the relatives had no knowledge of their whereabouts.

Mr. Dorjee rejected once again the offer of naturalization on the ground that mass acceptance of citizenship by Tibetan refugees in Bhutan would seriously undermine the struggle for liberation of Tibet.

TIBETAN RESPONSE TO BHUTANESE RESTRICTIONS:

As a result of this, the Bhutanese suggested that the only alternative left to Bhutan was to disperse all Tibetans into small groups throughout Bhutan. In response the Tibetans issued a five-point request:

1. The the Royal Government of Bhutan should permit His Holiness the Dalai Lama to maintain a liaison office in Bhutan. The function of such a liaison office would be to look after the material and spiritual welfare of the Tibetan refugees in the Kingdom. (It should be noted that this practice is accepted by all countries where there is a sizeable number of Tibetan refugees.)

2. That the Royal Government should not object to the maintenance of contact between the Tibetan refugees in Bhutan and Dharamsala. (The Royal Government would not agree to any contact of a political nature by the Tibetans in Bhutan with His Holiness' government in Dharamsala, but indicated that it would not object to Tibetan refugees maintaining ties of a personal nature with friends and relatives outside Bhutan.)

3. That the Royal Government should allow complete freedom of movement for Tibetan refugees in Bhutan. (Since 1974 the Royal Government imposed strict bans on the Tibetan inhabitants; this is not true of Nepalese and Indians living in Bhutan who enjoy complete, unrestricted freedom of movement.)

4. That the Royal Government should permit Tibetan refugees in Bhutan to educate their children wherever and however they wished without any interference, as long as educational standards were met.

5. That the Royal Government should continue to permit Tibetan refugees to enter Bhutan from Tibet in the future. (The Royal Government agreed to permit Tibetan refugees to cross into Bhutan from Tibet on humanitarian grounds; it declared that it would not grant escapees asylum in Bhutan, but would send them directly to India. However, as reported in the Tibetan Review, it has come to light that on several occasions Bhutanese authorities have turned back Tibetan refugees who were trying to cross the Tibet-Bhutan border.)

STALEMATE:

Following the stalemate in negotiations between the representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Royal Government of Bhutan, it was commonly accepted within Bhutanese quarters that the Royal Government would henceforth have no option but to treat all Tibetan refugees who do not accept Bhutanese citizenship as foreigners.

Through Mr. D.G. Dorjee, our chief negotiator, the Royal Government of Bhutan informed the other Tibetan representatives that there would be no objections should there be any Tibetans wishing to leave Bhutan and settle in India. In the view of the enormous aid already granted by the Government of India to the Tibetans rehabilitated in Bhutan, the representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama began consultations with the Government of India.

In February 1976, we were again reassured in an explicitly

written statement, by Bhutan's special representative Gyaphak Dorji to our representative Kalon Thubten Ningee that hereafter Tibetan refugees would not be asked to become Bhutanese citizens since Tibetans had expressed their strong feelings on this issue. However, it was during this time that the Bhutanese Welfare Minister announced that Tibetans were hereafter prohibited from publicly gathering at religious and festive occasions.

Then in May of the same year, the King of Bhutan declared that all Tibetans would be banished to remote parts of Bhutan in small groups. On September 28th a Tibetan named Kunzang Tsering was arrested and imprisoned along with his wife and two small children. In November, 1976, we received authentic reports that all middle level Tibetan students would be discharged from Bhutanese schools. Moreover, it was announced that all Tibetans would automatically be disqualified from joining governmental service. The year concluded with Radio Bhutan declaring publicly that the incarcerated Tibetans would not be released.

Additional factors contribute to the untractable situation in Bhutan:

1. The political tension between the Royal Wangchuk family and the Dorjee family of the late Prime Minister, Jigme Doejee. Though the families are related through marriage in the previous generation (the present Queen Mother is the sister of the late Prime Minister), their political differences stem from the assassination of the late Prime Minister and the subsequent exile of his younger brother, Lampe Dorjee, who briefly succeeded him as Prime Minister.

2. Before the late King passed away, he had for several years lived with Yangki, a Tibetan, who was publicly accepted as his second wife. She bore him several children causing a certain degree of political paranoia among the Dorjee family, since these children could make legitimate claims to the throne as heir apparents. At the time of the coronation, many observers of the Bhutanese political scene believed that the exiled Lampe Dorjee was allowed to return as a distraction in face of the fear of a second claim to the throne. It was alleged that the accusation of a Tibetan plot was concocted for Lampe Dorjee's maximum benefit.

Considering these possibilities, it is within reason to conceive that the Tibetans presented a timely and convenient scapegoat for a group of political opportunists.

3. It is also conceivable that Tibetan refugees, who through their hard work and intelligence have become more economically self-sufficient that the average Bhutanese, thus contributing to local animosity and other prejudices.

4. Owing to the Chinese sensitivity in reference to the question of the Tibetans-in-exile, there have been several definite expressions of discontent among various governments and international organizations about recognizing any Tibetan refugees at all.

5. Thus, these factors have contributed to the problem of rehabilitation among Tibetan refugees and the erosion of Tibetan integrity and individual pride with Bhutan.

Though the above factors may be overlooked by casual observers of the Tibetan situation, an incident that occurred in February of 1977 is too blatant to be disregarded.

Dasho Khampa, a Royal Bodyguard, along with two assistants and Karje Gainpo, Chief of the Karje Village, visited two Tibetan settlements at Karje and Bodgar where approximately one thousand Tibetans had settled. All the Tibetans were rounded up and told to obey the following dictum:

a. They were told to vacate their homes and property, which they had tirelessly cultivated throughout the years. (Simply stated, this demand was imposed on the Tibetans because the Bhutanese wanted the land back.)

b. They were told to look for new land, though property was scarce and it was virtually impossible to find areas that could accommodate more than three families.

c. Furthermore, if the Tibetans asked for compensation for the land they had worked for over ten years, then they would have to pay for the new land.

d. With regard to the houses built in these settlements, they were told that they could dismantle them or burn them if they desired, but the Bhutanese Government would not give any compensation.

According to the information received from the Home and Rehabilitation Office of the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, dated October 26, 1978 we learned that five more Tibetans had been arrested arbitrarily by the Bhutanese Government. The government made it known that the taking up of Bhutanese citizenship would not be an adequate compromise; every Tibetan who becomes a citizen must deliberately and effectively remove any "Tibetanese" thought or appearance.

Our stand on the question of citizenship, as we had repeatedly conveyed to the Royal Government, has been guided by two considerations: first and foremost to respect the wishes of Tibetan refugees in Bhutan, and secondly to help maintain the identity and cohesive unity of all Tibetans in exile in the overall interest of our cause. We have categorically advised Tibetan refugees not to interfere in the internal affairs of the country where they are residing and to be law-abiding. At the same time, we have never objected to individual Tibetans accepting Bhutanese citizenship on a voluntary basis though we could never approve of coerced en masse alterations in citizenship. In fact in our earliest dialogues as well as in a letter to Bhutan's Foreign Minister in February, 1979, we pointed out that much more than what forced naturalization could achieve is already being realized through natural integration, by way of intermarriage, use of Bhutanese language, dress etc. In other words, a natural process of assimilation has already started.

The National Assembly of Bhutan held their 50th Session in Thimphu, Bhutan, from June 15th to July 4th of this year. During this time they passed Resolution 64 which discusses the following points:

1. About 2300 Tibetans who have applied for Bhutanese citizenship will be separated from Tibetan refugees they will be granted Bhutanese citizenship and all assistance formally agreed to by the Government will be accorded them. (Until this announcement the Bhutanese Government always maintained the Tibetan refugee figure to be approximately 4000. Even the first official announcement of the arrest of 28 refugees, as detailed in the official Bhutanese Government bulletin, Kuensel, dated May 12-19, 1974, gives the figure as 4000.)

2. The 4000 Tibetans who had clearly stated that they wanted to leave Bhutan rather than accept Bhutanese citizenship and integrate into the society, will immediately be expelled from the country. Detaining them by force against their will would not be in the interest of the country.

3. All the members of the Assembly unanimously expressed the view that since the government of India is not willing to accept the Tibetan refugees, they would be repatriated to Tibet. His Majesty intervened to point out that as Buddhists it would be wrong to drive these refugees to Tibet until an attempt had been made to resettle the Tibetans in other countries.

Following the advice of His Majesty, the Bhutanese Government appealed to eight countries in June 1979 (Austria, Australia,

Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland) and asked whether the refugees could be resettled there. At present, Australia and Switzerland have declined to receive any refugees, while the other above named countries have politely indicated their inability to accept the refugees, in light of the current Vietnamese refugee problem.

The Government of India has expressed its inability to accept any refugees from Bhutan, since out of the approximately 80,000 Tibetans already settled there, some 6,000 still await rehabilitation.

Since no country has demonstrated a willingness to accept the Tibetans if they are expelled from Bhutan, the National Assembly decided that Resolution 64 on the expulsion, must be implemented. Steps to remove the refugees from their present settlements have already been taken. Tibetan refugees in two settlements in Bhunthang and Thimphu were informed in September 1979, by officials of the Bhutanese Home Ministry that they would be forced to relocate by the 24th of September; the Bhunthang refugees to Korto, bordering Tibet, and the Thimphu refugees to an unspecified location.

In view of these facts the expulsion of the Tibetan refugees, most likely back into Tibet must be regarded as imminent.